

Scars by DefinitelyYou

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M, Fluff, I just want these two to be happy!, Jancy

Language: English

Characters: Dustin, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Jonathan Byers & Nancy Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington & Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-09-23

Updated: 2017-10-06

Packaged: 2022-04-02 01:42:32

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 3

Words: 5,872

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Jonathan Byers holds onto his one connection to the night he cut his hand open to lure a monster from the Upside Down to save his brother. And a connection to her, Nancy Wheeler, his fellow monster hunter. Aside from his constant worry about Will, his life is slowly returning to normal—Jonathan Byers is once again the high school loner, and Nancy Wheeler is the perfect student with the popular boyfriend. Or at least that's how it seems.

1. December

Author's Note:

I've always been intrigued by the idea that Jonathan and Nancy will have matching scars after the night they fought the Demogorgon. so this is my take on what those scars may mean to each of them. I also miss these two characters and needed to hang out with them a bit more as we wait for Season 2. As always, enjoy!

"You should really put some Neosporin on that."

"Hmmm?" Jonathan Byers absently asks his mother, Joyce, who is reaching over his shoulder to put a fresh stack of toast on the table. After another nearly sleepless night, he must have lost track of time. Jonathan didn't even realize he'd been picking at the nearly healed cut down the middle of his left palm.

"Your cut. It still looks pretty raw, like it might leave a scar," she says turning back to the scrambled eggs cooking on the stove. "The Neosporin will help it heal. There's some in the bathroom if you need it," she says over her shoulder.

"Oh, okay, thanks," Jonathan responds, though he knows he won't follow her advice.

Each time the cut starts to scab up, he picks at it again, re-opening the wound. At first, he thought he might be addicted to the pain of it, the sharp stab he feels as the blood starts to pool on the surface of his palm. Anything to keep his mind from worrying about his little brother, Will, the boy who came back to life. Will may have returned from the dead (or, however implausible it sounds, an alternate dimension they refer to as the Upside Down), but he sure isn't the same boy who disappeared a little over a month ago, even though no one seems to want to admit it.

Jonathan now thinks the real reason he picks at his cut is to hold on to some connection to the night he sliced his hand open to lure a

monster from the Upside Down to save his brother. And a connection to her, Nancy Wheeler, his fellow monster hunter. They spent nearly every waking hour of the day together during the week his brother and her best friend went missing, plotting ways to kill the faceless beast, but now, he barely sees her, rarely talks to her. Aside from his constant worry about Will, his life is slowly returning to normal—Jonathan Byers is once again the high school loner, and Nancy Wheeler is the perfect student with the popular boyfriend. Or at least that's how it seems.

"Ouch," he says under his breath. He hadn't realize he'd been picking at his cut again. He looks down and sees the familiar pool of red that is filling his palm.

"Jonathan, you're going to be late," his mother calls to him.

"Oh shit," he says, as he squeezes his hand shut and gets up to grab his coat and bag.

"Jonathan!" Joyce calls.

"Sorry," he says as he heads into the living room to look for his bag.

"And don't forget to take care of that cut."

"I will," he calls back. "Hey Will, let's get going."

Will, dressed and ready to go, runs out of his room, past Jonathan, and out the front door. By the time Jonathan makes it to his beat-up old car, Will is already buckled into the front seat.

"What's the rush?" Jonathan asks his brother.

"We've got a science assignment due today, and I really need to talk with the guys. Can we go already?" Will pleads.

"I'm going," Jonathan snaps back, growing annoyed at the turn the entire morning has taken. Thanks to recurring nightmares featuring a lost brother, a monster without a face, and a blue-eyed girl that's always out of reach, he slept barely two hours last night. Needless to say, his nerves are a bit frayed. Jonathan knows he shouldn't be annoyed with his mom or brother, but he just can't shake the feeling.

Sighing, he slips a cassette tape into the radio—The Clash, Will's favorite—and heads down his long driveway and into Hawkins.

A few minutes later, they pull up to the Wheeler's house, where Mike, Nancy's brother, and their friend Lucas are waiting on the front porch. Before Jonathan has put the car into park, Mike and Lucas are already opening the door to the back seat. They rush into the car in a jumble of arms and legs and backpacks, and immediately begin to grill Will on their science project. Jonathan has just put the car into reverse when he notices Nancy wave to him from her porch. He stops the car and waits as she runs over to them, knocking on the window when she finally reaches them.

"Can you give me a ride to school?" Nancy asks once Will rolls down his window. "Um, Steve is sick today, and my mom has to take Holly to the doctor, so I thought . . .," she trails off, looking up at Jonathan with those big blue eyes that haunt his nightmares—and his dreams.

"Sure," he responds, quickly looking away from her gaze. "Okay, Will, hop into the backseat so Nancy can get in."

Will rolls his eyes at Jonathan, unbuckles himself, and throws his backpack and himself over the front seat, landing with a loud thump on top of Mike and Lucas, who groan in response. Jonathan shoots Will a dirty look through the rear view mirror, and Will sticks his tongue out in response. Jonathan can't help but chuckle at these rare moments when Will seems like himself again, if only for moment.

"Thanks for making room," Nancy says once she's settled.

"Sure," Jonathan says again, puts the car into drive, and focuses on the road ahead, anything to distract himself from the girl sitting next to him. He has fought a monster with her, slept in her bed, but now that life is seemingly back to normal, he can't seem to figure out how to interact with her. That, and she's still with Steve.

"So, how've you been?" she asks innocently enough.

"Um, fine," he says, still refusing to look at her. "You?"

"Oh, you know, okay," she says, looking out the window. "Not

getting much sleep,” she follows quietly.

“Really?” he asks, finally turning to her.

“Really,” she says looking over at him. And then he takes a good look at her—her eyes aren’t as vibrant as they once were, and they are ringed with dark circles.

Even her hair doesn’t shine as much as it once did.

“Me too,” he says, dividing his attention between her and the road. She looks up at him unexpectedly and opens her mouth to say something but is suddenly cut off by her little brother.

“Jonathan,” Mike yells from the backseat, “we’re here.”

Jonathan turns his eyes back to the road, makes a hard left turn that causes the backseat’s occupants to fall over each other yet again, and parks half-way between Hawkins High School and Middle School. The boys quickly slide out of the backseat, leaving Jonathan and Nancy alone for the first time since that fateful week. “See ya tonight,” Will yells over his shoulder and rushes to keep up with Mike and Lucas.

“How’s he doing?” Nancy asks as they both get out of the car.

“To be honest, I don’t know. Sometimes, like now, he seems perfectly fine. Other times, well, he seems lost, almost like he’s not really here,” Jonathan says.

“It hasn’t been that long, Jonathan,” Nancy says. “Just give him some more time.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” he says, offering her a shy smile, which she returns.

“And Mike? How’s he do . . . ” Jonathan asks but is soon cut off by a familiar voice coming from across the parking lot.

“Nance! Hey, Nancy!” Steve Harrington calls.

In an instant, Nancy’s smile fades and her eyes somehow change,

almost cloud over. She turns towards her boyfriend's voice. "Steve?" she calls. "What are you doing here? I thought you were sick."

As Steve jogs over to them across the parking lot, Jonathan can feel himself shrinking into the background. It's not that he and Steve don't get along—in fact, Steve has gone out of his way to treat him as a friend—but Jonathan still can't shake the feeling that he just doesn't belong in Steve's world. Or Nancy's for that matter.

"Why did you think that? I stopped by your house, and your mom said you left with Byers—hey, Byers—what happened?"

"I don't know. I swear my mom told me that you were sick today, so I, um, took advantage of Jonathan giving Mike a ride, and here I am," Nancy says a little too loudly, her eyes a little too wide. Jonathan knows immediately that Nancy isn't quite telling the truth, and he wonders what's really going on. Does the monster still haunt her dreams or is she missing Barb, her best friend who wasn't as lucky as Will.

"Well thanks, Byers, for giving her a ride," Steve says. "Are you sure YOU aren't sick Nancy? You don't look so hot," he adds wrapping his arm around his girlfriend.

"I'm fine, Steve, really," she says, giving him a too-wide smile.

"If you say so, Nance. Wanna head to class?" Steve asks.

"You go ahead. I left a book in Jonathan's car. I'll catch up in a sec," she says, squeezing his hand.

"Okay. See ya, Byers," Steve says as he turns towards the high school.

"Nancy, you didn't leave a book in my car," Jonathan says.

"I know," she says quietly. "But I wanted to ask you one last thing."

"Okay . . . "

"Can I see your hand?"

"What?" he asks, confused.

“Your hand, you know, your cut. How is it?” she asks.

“Oh, it’s still a bit raw,” Jonathan says, opening his palm for her to see. Nancy leans in to look more closely at his cut, and he can smell her shampoo for a brief moment.

“Mine’s getting better, it’s nearly healed,” she says opening her left palm to show him a slightly raised pink line. “You should put some Neosporin on it. It would really help.”

“I know. My mom told me the same thing this morning,” he says wearily.

Nancy looks up at him and smiles, a real, genuine smile. Jonathan notices that her eyes are clear blue again, as if clouds have suddenly cleared. His breath catches in his chest, and it takes all of his energy to stop himself from reaching out to her. She looks down at his hand once again and gently follows the crooked line of the cut with her finger. Her touch is as light as a feather, yet strong enough for him to feel it throughout his entire body. It stings, much like the wound he’s refused to let fully heal.

“I gotta go,” she says suddenly, moving away from Jonathan. He notices that her eyes are stormy once again when she looks up at him. “Thanks, Jonathan, for the ride.”

“Sure, Nancy,” he says quietly as she turns to go, pulling the collar of her jacket up to cover her neck and ears. He watches her make her way across the crowded parking lot and into the school before he follows.

2. February

“Jonathan, will you PLEASE put on some gloves? It’s freezing outside!”

“Mom, you know how much I hate them,” Jonathan calls back to his mother as he heads to the front door on his way to school.

“I don’t care. I’m not going to have you get frost bite on my watch,” Joyce hollers back. She rounds the corner between their dining room and living room faster than Jonathan can avoid her and stuffs a pair of bright blue gloves into his hands. “Take these, and I expect to see them on you by the time you reach the car.”

Jonathan knows not to challenge his mother when she’s like this, so he grabs the gloves and stomps out to the car. When he gets into the driver’s seat, he makes a big show of putting on the gloves and waving back to him mom, who is watching him from the front door. She waves back and closes the door. Once she’s out of sight, Jonathan pulls off the gloves and throws them in the backseat (along with at least three other pair she’s given to him in the last month).

January 1984 was one of the coldest on record in Hawkins, Indiana, and February is turning out to be just as frigid, if not more so. Jonathan has always hated wearing gloves, even when he was a kid. He didn’t think he could use his hands as well, couldn’t make the killer snowballs he liked to throw at Will or, later, get a true feel as he steered his old car down Hawkins’ country roads. Once he took up photography, his frustration with them only grew; he especially hated putting any layer between him and his camera, wanting to focus his lens precisely or to make sure he gets the shutter speed just right. And now that he has a brand new camera—thanks to an unexpected Christmas gift from Nancy (and Steve, he guesses)—there’s no way he’s putting any barrier between it and his hands.

So despite his mother’s best efforts, Jonathan has refused to wear gloves over the winter, and he’s now paying for it. His hands are chapped, and the cut on his left palm that he finally let heal has turned into a long, hard ridge that is particularly annoying. It doesn’t hurt any longer, but it’s always present and often offsets his hold on

his camera ever so slightly, enough to frustrate him to no end. His rush to get out of the house this morning was to make sure he had enough time to stop by the darkroom and check on his last batch of photos. He had taken some promotional photos for the upcoming Hawkins High play, and he is worried that he may have to reshoot them if the framing was off.

The parking lot is empty when he arrives at school, but he still parks as far away from the school as possible. He isn't really sure why. Maybe he's trying to perpetuate his status as the high school loner. Now that he has officially joined the yearbook staff to get some more experience under his belt before applying to NYU (the school he's dreamed about attending his entire life), he's made a couple of friends, doesn't spend as many lunches alone in the darkroom or in his car. In all honesty, he's not really sure where he now stands in the hierarchy of Hawkins High School, but he doesn't worry about it much. He has much bigger worries on his mind, like Will, his mom, and, sometimes, Nancy.

Walking through the high school's main door, he's surprised to see Nancy standing at her locker. She normally arrives with Steve right before the final bell rings, so it's odd to see her here alone. He thinks about walking past her, but something about her demeanor makes him stop. They haven't really talked since Christmas, when she gave him the camera (and then kissed his cheek, but he tries his best to forget that part). Aside from the standard "I'm fine" or "I'm studying a lot," Jonathan has no sense of how Nancy is holding up so far this year. Maybe their friendship has faded, but he hasn't stopped caring about her. He can't ignore her presence when something about it seems just a bit off.

"Nancy?" he says quietly as he approaches her from behind. She doesn't respond.

"Nancy, are you okay?" he says again a bit louder.

"Jonathan," she says, startled. "I didn't see you there." He nods his head in response.

"Hey," she finally says after a beat or two.

“Hey,” he says in return. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, fine,” she says, a bit too loudly, her eyes a bit too wide (as they often are when she’s not telling the truth).

“Are you sure? You look a bit lost.”

“No, I’m good. I just came to school a bit early to get some studying in before first hour. I have a big test today,” she says, doing her best to put on a happy face.

“Okay, good. But if you need to talk, I’m here, you know,” he says.

Nancy looks up at him, and he swears she’s about to cry. “Hey, what is it?” he asks, reaching out instinctively for her arm, which she jerks away from him. Jonathan takes a step back—he’s clearly crossed a line, one that he didn’t realize existed. Hurt and embarrassed, he turns to head to the darkroom.

“No, wait, Jonathan, it’s not you,” she says, clearly exasperated. He turns toward her again and looks at her warily.

“I’m sorry, I’m just a bit on edge. School is pretty overwhelming right now, and I’m still not sleeping very well. I’m just not really myself.”

“I get it,” Jonathan says. “Life isn’t really normal for us yet, either. It’s hard, I know.”

“Do you?” she asks coldly.

“I think I do, Nancy, but I how can I know for sure? It’s not like we’ve talked a lot in the last few months,” he responds, just as icily.

Her mouth opens in response but no words come out. Instead, she just stares at him, eyes and mouth wide open. He takes this opportunity to turn on his heels and head to the security of the darkroom. Once there, he locks the door behind him, leans against the door and slides down until he’s sitting on the floor, his back to Hawkins high.

He knows she’s right. Why would he know what she’s going through? They don’t talk, don’t hang out. He sees her in their one shared class

and maybe passing in the hall. She doesn't even come out when he picks Will up at her house anymore. And she sure doesn't drop Mike off at his. But her words hurt all the same. God, he's such an idiot to think that their one week together would somehow change their relationship. She's made it clear that she has no interest in perpetuating their friendship. But that kiss at Christmas? Why would she kiss his cheek? He can understand the camera—it was a truce, a peace offering for breaking his old one—but the kiss? It can't mean anything, really. Perhaps it was simply her way of saying goodbye. When all is said and done, he's the one with feelings for Nancy. She's made it clear she doesn't feel the same, and he should simply stop trying to make it more than it really is.

Jonathan hears the final bell before classes begin and gets up, frustrated that he didn't get a chance to check his photos. He opens the door and stomps down the hall to class, refusing to look at anyone as he passes by. The loner is back.

“Byers, you clean up nice.”

“Yeah, right, Steve,” Jonathan responds to Nancy's boyfriend, who ran into him in the corner of the gymnasium where he'd been hiding, hoping to fade into the background. Tonight was the annual Valentine's Dance, and Jonathan had somehow been talked into covering the ridiculous event for the yearbook.

“Not really your scene,” Steve says to him laughing.

“How can you tell?” he responds with a smirk. “You, on the other hand, fit right in.”

“Are you kidding me? I hate these things,” Steve says. “Nancy's the one who wanted to come. I'd much rather be at home drinking a six pack.”

Jonathan doesn't respond. He has no idea what to say. “Yeah, me too!” or “You don't want to disappoint, Nancy, do you?” Everything about this moment is awkward. Steve isn't the asshole Jonathan once thought he was, but there's really nothing that connects them. Well, except Nancy and the night they fought the Demogorgon.

“Well, if I don’t get back soon, Nancy will have to dance alone,” Steve says patting his pack. “Stop by and say hello if you get a chance. I’m sure she’d love to see you.”

“Yeah. Sure,” Jonathan says as Steve walks across the gymnasium full of couples dressed in tulle and silk with far too much mousse and make-up. “Total Eclipse of the Heart” starts to play and Jonathan groans to himself as the couples take the dance floor. He hadn’t planned on being here tonight, had tried to avoid it all costs, but one of his fellow yearbook photographers had gotten sick at the last minute, and they needed someone to cover the dance. Jonathan surprisingly didn’t have to work on a Saturday night, so he figured he had nowhere better to be.

He should have expected to see Steve and Nancy, but he had somehow forgotten they might be at the dance. He had been focused on figuring out how he was going to survive the terrible music, horrible dresses, and overabundance of PDAs and not on what might happen if he saw his fellow monster hunters. He had avoided Nancy since that day a few weeks ago, and she had nearly disappeared from his life. But then he walked into the gym, and she and Steve were the very first people he saw. She looked beautiful in her simple black dress and red heels, hair pulled up in a loose bun. Steve looked equally good—and ridiculously cool—in a black tux with an open collar, his hair effortlessly styled as usual.

When Jonathan saw them, he couldn’t move, was literally stopped in his tracks. Nancy looked so happy, so carefree. She was laughing at something Steve had said, and Jonathan’s heart broke in that moment. Whatever connection they had once had was gone. And he, again, was on the sidelines of it all behind a camera lens.

Luckily, Nancy and Steve didn’t see him. A classmate bumping into his arm broke his gaze, and Jonathan made an immediate beeline for the side of the gym where he settled himself in the perfect spot to take candid photos of the ridiculous high school ritual. It wasn’t until Steve ran into him sneaking back into the gym after a cigarette that Jonathan was noticed by anyone.

“Every Breathe You Take” is now playing, and the dance floor is full of couples slow dancing, hands sliding a bit too low for the

chaperones' tolerance—Jonathan even gets a great photo of their gym teaching moving Tommy H.'s hands off of Carol's ass. He'd love to show to Nancy, see if he could get her to laugh as freely as she had with Steve. But he quickly puts that thought aside and scans the room looking for a few other candid moments. And then he sees her.

Nancy is looking directly at him, well looking directly at his lens. When she doesn't shift her gaze, he knows that this is not an accident. She's not smiling, but she's not unfriendly either. He focuses in closer on her face, and he notices that her eyes are stormy once again and that despite how beautiful she looks tonight, dark circles still ring her eyes. Feeling suddenly self-conscious, Jonathan drops his camera to his chest. He's taken uninvited photos of Nancy before, and he won't ever do it again, even if she's aware of his presence. When he looks back over to her, she's still looking at him. When she catches his eye this time, she raises her left hand to him and, finally, smiles. He raises his left hand to her and smiles back. They are mirror images of the other, down to their matching scars that shine in the dim light of the dance. After 30 seconds or more, Jonathan forces himself to break her gaze. He could have stayed like that all night, but to what end?

He picks up his camera and refocuses it on her once more. Her hand is down, but she's still looking over at him, with a slightly confused look on her face. Jonathan nearly presses the shutter of his camera but stops himself. Tonight, Nancy showed him exactly what she was thinking and feeling with the simple wave of a scarred hand. He didn't need to capture it on film to know that she was falling apart.

3. April

Notes for the Chapter:

As October 27 approaches, I realize that I honestly have no idea what's in store for Jonathan and Nancy next season (aside from the minor footage we've seen), so I'll continue to play in the world that I've created in my mind where Jancy is endgame. I hope folks enjoy this world as well. Thanks to everyone for reading, for liking, and commenting on the story. It's greatly appreciated.

“Jonathan!” Karen Wheeler calls from her front door. “Do you have a second?”

Jonathan spins on his heels and walks back up the front lawn to be within earshot of Mrs. Wheeler.

“Sure,” he calls in response.

“Can you remind your mom that Will needs to be picked up by 9 tomorrow morning? We have a family obligation in Indianapolis, and we need to be on the road no later than 9:30.”

“I’ll probably be picking him up in the morning, so I’ll be sure to be here by 9,” he says.

“Great. Thanks so much, Jonathan,” Mrs. Wheeler says with smile before waving goodbye and shutting the door.

Jonathan turns back towards his car and tries to figure out how he’s going to juggle getting to work on time and picking up Will in the morning. His mom is out on a date tonight with Bob, and he’s pretty sure she won’t make it home by 9:00 am—or at least that hasn’t been the case recently. Maybe he can simply bring Will with him to the movie theatre until his mom gets home. It shouldn’t be an issue. He’s so focused on the logistics of work and Will that he doesn’t notice Nancy sitting in the front seat of his car until he shuts his door.

“Jesus, Nancy,” Jonathan exclaims dropping his keys in the process. “You scared the shit out of me.”

Nancy doesn’t flinch or explain her presence, instead asking quietly, “Can you still see it?”

“See what?” Jonathan asks confused. He leans down to pick up his keys and turns to look at her.

“Your cut, your scar. Can you still see it?” she asks almost desperately.

“Yeah. It’s faded a bit, but it’s still there,” he responds.

Nancy suddenly reaches across the car and grabs his left hand, opening it up to see his palm. She gently runs her index finger upon the small ridge of skin that is now the only physical trace of that terrifying night. Her touch sends chills up Jonathan’s arm, and he instinctively pulls his hand back, but Nancy won’t let go.

“Mine is nearly gone, you can barely see it. But yours—it’s still here,” she says.

“Nancy, why does this matter?” he asks gently.

It takes her a couple of minutes to answer. When she does, she takes a deep breath, almost as if she’s preparing herself for an underwater dive. “It’s the only reminder I have left, and it’s nearly gone,” she starts. “That week, Barb, the monster, everyone wants to go on pretending it didn’t happen, that all is back to normal. But it’s not. It’s not normal, and it never will be.”

Nancy pauses, but Jonathan doesn’t interrupt. This is the first time she’s opened up to him in months, and he’s not going to risk stifling her. So he sits and waits.

“My scar was my reminder, but now that’s nearly gone,” she says, lifting up her hand to show him. She’s right—her scar is far less noticeable than his. She probably didn’t spend most of the winter reopening the wound like he did. “I needed you . . . I, um, needed a reminder that what happened was real.”

She gently lets his hand go, but she won't look at him, focusing on some invisible spot outside of the car window.

"I don't need a scar to be reminded of what happened," Jonathan says softly. "Will is a reminder enough. He's not well, Nancy."

"I know," she says quietly, finally turning back to look at him. The kindness he sees in her eyes gives him the courage to continue.

"But I didn't want mine to fade either," he continues. "I kept reopening the wound, you know."

"You did? Really?"

"Yeah, for at least a month or more. Every time it looked like it was finally healing, I'd scratch at it until it opened up again."

"Why?"

"I guess I wasn't ready to let it heal, to let go of that night, that week. The cut was my only reminder of . . ." he trails off.

"Of what, Jonathan?"

"You," he whispers, unable to hold her gaze any longer.

"Me?"

He nods his head but refuses to look at her, picking at a loose string on his steering wheel instead. Nancy doesn't say anything, but she doesn't turn away from him either. They sit in silence for a minute or two until she finally speaks up.

"Do you want to go somewhere and talk?" she asks.

"Yeah, sure," Jonathan says, garnering enough courage to look back at her. She smiles at him then, a shy smile, which he returns. "Where to?"

"Wherever is fine, as long as it's just the two of us. I don't think I can handle anyone else tonight."

Jonathan can feel the heat rising on his neck cheeks, but he doesn't care. He reaches across her into the glove compartment and digs around for the mix tape he made last week.

"What are you doing," Nancy asks.

"Looking for a tape," he says looking over his shoulder at her. "We need some good music if we're going for a drive."

"Oh, so that's your plan," she asks, bumping his shoulder playfully.

"I don't have a plan, Nancy. I actually have no idea what I'm doing," he responds, just as playfully.

"Good, that makes two of us," she says settling back into the passenger seat.

Jonathan finally finds the tape he was looking for—one that has all of his favorites: Bowie, Television, Joy Division, The Cure—and pops it in the tape deck. He then turns on the car and pulls out of the cul-de-sac for who knows where.

"Want to get some food?" he asks.

"No, I'd like to just talk, if that's okay."

"Of course that's okay, Nancy."

And then the conversation stops. Jonathan honestly doesn't know what to say, where to begin. And then Nancy blurts out in one giant rush of breath, "I'm sorry, Jonathan. For cutting you out of my life."

This was the last thing Jonathan expected to hear at that moment, and he doesn't know how to respond. The distance she put between them over the last few months had hurt him, had rebuilt a wall between them that was as tough and ragged as his scar. Nancy had started to chip away at it the moment she reached for his hand, but he's not sure he can handle more right now.

"You had Steve," he finally says, and he can feel her recoil into herself.

"That's different," she responds, looking out the window once again.

"Can you tell me how it's different? Steve is your boyfriend, Nancy. I'm just someone you hunted a monster with for a day or two."

"Steve's not my boyfriend."

"What?"

"We broke up. Two weeks ago . . . it just didn't work out."

"So why did you stay with him for so long?"

"He was my normal, Jonathan. After we lost Barb and found Will, I wanted everything to go back to normal. I thought that would make it easier to live with. And you weren't part of my normal."

"But I am now?" he asks, sounding more bitter than he actually feels.

"No, you're not. But I don't want normal anymore. Normal doesn't change anything. I still lost my best friend. My brother still pines for a girl who disappeared. Will is still sick. And monsters are real," she says becoming more agitated as she goes on. "All I know is that I felt different when I was with you. Stronger, braver. Even in the face of all of that death, I felt more alive than I ever had. We were a team, Jonathan, and I let that go just for the sake of normal. I actually became the suburban girl you accused me of being."

"No, you didn't, Nancy. I was wrong. You could never be that."

"Yes, I could—and I was. But then I'd see you at school or at the dance, and I didn't know what to do. I wanted to talk to you, find out how you were, but I knew that if I did, I'd never have normal again."

"Would that be so terrible?" Jonathan asks.

"No," she says shaking her head. "It wouldn't."

"Then why now? Why break up with Steve after all this time?"

"You know that I haven't slept in months. I have nightmares about the monster and Barb all the time. I wake up my family almost every

night screaming . . ."

"God, Nancy, why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't want you to feel sorry for me or . . . I don't know," she says shaking her head. "Then one night a few weeks ago, after my mom came running into my room after a particularly bad nightmare, she asked me why I call your name. I had no idea what she was talking about. I mean, you were sometimes part of my nightmares, but not always. And she told me that I call your name out almost every night. Your name. Not Steve's, not Barb's, yours. I've literally spent every night for the last five months trying to find you and every day trying to avoid you."

Jonathan is speechless.

"I figured it was time I finally gave up on normal, Jonathan."

Jonathan still can't think of what to say. He thinks she's telling him that she has feelings for him, too, but it doesn't quite compute. Shaking his head to somehow make sense of the situation, he realizes that he's driven to the long driveway leading to his house.

"Why did I come here?" he asks himself.

"Where are we?" Nancy asks, looking up and noticing her surroundings for the first time.

"My house. I brought us to my house. I'm sorry. I really don't know why I came back here."

"It's okay. I don't mind."

Jonathan continues up the long driveway into his normal parking spot, turns off his engine, and finally gathers his thoughts.

"Nancy, I can't be there for you only when you're scared or lonely. I think you know how I feel about you, and . . ."

Instead of responding, Nancy reaches across the front seat and takes his left hand, gently kissing the scar on his palm. "I know."

“You do?”

“Yeah.”

Jonathan shifts in his seat and takes Nancy’s chin in his hand, lifting her head so that he can look directly into her eyes. They are still tired and ringed in shadow, but the clear blue has returned. She holds his gaze and smiles, which is all the encouragement he needs. He closes the distance between them suddenly, enveloping her in a kiss. She hesitates only for a moment and then wraps her arms around his neck and pulls herself closer to him. He’s not sure how long they kiss, but he doesn’t care.

“Hey,” he says to her after the part, suddenly becoming shy.

“Hey yourself,” she says back to him and then propels herself out of the car. She rushes over to the driver’s side door, opens it up, and pulls him out.

“Come on, Jonathan, let’s finally finish what we started.”